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## *The Regan Book*

**T**HIS IS NOT a city of small egos, but every now and then a true pouter pigeon struts across the stage and becomes part of the standard of comparison. So it is with Donald Regan. In office, his deformity obscured his accomplishments, themselves never all that grand. Now it has overtaken what he plainly intended to be the sharp barb in his book.

This is a no-shame administration in which, for the right amount of money, everyone Speakes on leaving office. No decent interval to let the issues cool and the targets also return to private life; that would diminish the advance. The self-serving volumes—first Alexander Haig, then David Stockman, Michael Deaver, Larry Speakes, now this—have turned the administration into a kind of living soap opera. Greed is not a total explanation, nor is the desire to silver-polish and tarnish living reputations. Those are ancient motives. The peculiar lack of central discipline in this administration—the lack of a certain kind of respect for the president—has also played a role.

Mr. Regan's particular target is Mrs. Reagan, whom he accuses a) of interfering and b) of doing so according to the wispy dictates of astrology. The latter part of this is certainly bothersome if true, much more so than the former. Mr. Regan is one who has always seemed to think a woman's place is

somewhere other than in government, which we sense he regards as a plush men's locker room. His famous suggestion that women could hardly be expected to concern themselves with throw-weight, a subject he himself only dimly understood, remains Exhibit A. Yet the policy interventions of which he accuses Mrs. Reagan in his snit seem pretty sound to us. She didn't think an awful lot of Health and Human Services Secretary Margaret Heckler, wanted Labor Secretary Raymond Donovan out, later wanted CIA Director William Casey out and finally Mr. Regan himself. She thought that Caspar Weinberger should give a little ground on the defense budget, and reportedly felt that the president's 1987 State of the Union address could genuflect a little less toward the right-to-lifers. Good for her.

Mr. Regan also whines a lot. In good times and bad he is a victim. As Treasury secretary and chief of staff he believes that he was underappreciated, until Iran-contra arose; for that he says he was unfairly blamed. He did the good stuff, someone else the bad; that is his unfailing version. A perturbed Mr. Regan once said, rather poetically, we thought, that as chief of staff it was his job to follow the parade and clean up after the elephant. The metaphor holds; the only difference now is that Mr. Regan is no longer part of the solution, but part of the problem.